

## **Montana Legal Needs Study**

Sixteen percent or more of Montana's population lives in poverty. Because of this, many people cannot afford the basic civil legal services essential to improving their quality of life. In order to identify the populations with the greatest need for civil legal services and the areas of law that are the most neglected, the Montana Supreme Court's Equal Justice Task Force began the ambitious task of overseeing the volunteer administration of the first ever Montana Legal Needs Study in March of 2003. The study, which is gathering information regarding the unmet civil legal needs of low-income Montanans, will be used to promote awareness, secure funding, and guide future legal outreach efforts to those Montanans who are unable to afford civil legal services.

The main component of the study is a survey used to gather data from roughly 1,000 individuals throughout the state. Upon completion, the data will include information regarding these individuals' past experiences with the justice system, the specific types of legal problems that are the most prevalent, and what resources are currently available and being utilized by those in need of legal assistance. Information from twelve cluster groups is included in the study. The cluster groups are as follows: Domestic Abuse Survivors; Migrant Workers; Homeless; Incarcerated Adults; Immigrants; Persons with Mental and Developmental Disabilities; Persons with Physical Disabilities; Reservation Based Native Americans; Off-Reservation Native Americans; Senior Citizens; Moderate Income; Low-Income Control Group.

An immense undertaking, the study involves cooperation among many social services agencies and hundreds of volunteers throughout the state. Over the past months, volunteers have been administering surveys across Montana. With this cooperation, approximately two thirds of the surveys have been completed. When all of the surveys have been received, a comprehensive report will be compiled and made available to those organizations and individuals with a vested interest in the results of the study.

If you would like more information about the study please contact Ann Gilkey at (406) 447-2201 or [agilkey@montanabar.org](mailto:agilkey@montanabar.org)